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Dear Chairman Sanchez, Chairman McCrory, and Members of the Education Committee: thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of SB 948: AN ACT ADDRESSING EDUCATION FUNDING AND RACIAL EQUITY IN CONNECTICUT

My name is Daniel Pearson and I am the State Director for Educators for Excellence-Connecticut, a teacher-led organization with nearly 1,000 members statewide that seeks to elevate teacher voice in policy decisions. Today I submit testimony on behalf of our members who are current classroom teachers and who work tirelessly to ensure that their students have the best educational experience possible. These teachers work with the very students affected by these policies and they urge you to pass this bill out of committee and work with your colleagues and the Governor's office to incorporate this bill in this year's budget.

The teachers I support meet regularly to identify challenges in our education system and provide recommendations to solve these issues. We regularly hear from teachers who do not have enough dedicated ESL instructors to support their students who are learning english. Teachers who worry that their students are facing immense trauma in their communities but whose schools don't have sufficient resources to help them.

Equitable school funding is at the heart of many pressing issues that plague our teachers and students, particularly our students of highest need. That is why I'm here today: to urge state leaders to pass this bill now to ensure we don't leave behind another generation of students because the system is fundamentally flawed. As teachers know all too well, each year that a student falls behind, the chances that they catch up decreases exponentially. That is why we must treat this issue with the urgency it deserves. All students deserve the chance for success no matter their circumstances, and right now, this chance is only routinely afforded to a few of our state's children--overwhelmingly white, affluent children. And while we let our most vulnerable schools remain underfunded, our teachers are provided with fewer and fewer resources to effectively teach our students of highest need.

Due to the inadequate investment in high poverty and English language learner students, the ECS formula leaves almost 80,000 students lacking adequate education resources. In addition, Bridgeport, New Britain, New Haven and other districts are excluded from these funds due to the arbitrary and needlessly high bar to be qualified as a high poverty area, leaving some of CT's largest and highest-need districts struggling. Also, the current phase-in approach is leaving a generation of students behind and telling those students that they are not worthy of our investment. We cannot make up for this lost time in the future. The impact is happening now and the time to pass this bill is now.

On top of everything, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are rippling through our communities further exacerbating the inequities in our education system. Although cities have or will receive a one-time payment from the federal government, the funding inequities in Connecticut are structural and will not be solved with a one-time cash infusion. Any progress made by federal dollars will be short term and not sustainable.

Equitable school funding is needed, and it's needed now. We've seen the need with low attendance numbers for our most vulnerable students. We've heard the need from frustrated teachers who want the best for their students, but lack the resources and guidance to aid them. We've seen the need from parents who are concerned about the effectiveness of the COVID-19 protocols and are opting to keep their children out of the classroom.

With a \$639 million funding gap between white districts and everyone else, we cannot say we are taking the needs of our students seriously. Connecticut has some of the best performing public schools in the country in majority white school districts, while having some of the worst performing public schools in majority BIPOC districts.

To close the opportunity gap, CT needs to improve the education funding system now, in this legislative session, and that starts with passing this bill. Without these changes, we are doing a tremendous disservice for our most vulnerable students and the teachers that serve them with unwavering commitment.

Thank you for your time,

Daniel Pearson
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Educators For Excellence - Connecticut (E4E-CT)

About E4E

Founded by public school teachers, Educators for Excellence is a growing movement of more than 33,000 educators nationwide, united around a common set of values and principles for improving student learning and elevating the teaching profession. We work together to identify issues that impact our schools, create solutions to these challenges, and advocate for policies and programs that give all students access to a quality education.

For more information, please visit e4e.org.